



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

JUL 19 2017

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF

WW-16J

Diana Klemens, Chief
Surface Water Assessment Section
Water Resources Division
Michigan Department Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 30273
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7773

Dear Ms. Klemens:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has conducted a review of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality's (MDEQ) draft 2018 Integrated Report Assessment Methodology, which was on public notice from June 14, 2017 to July 14, 2017. Please find enclosed our comments on the draft Methodology.

We appreciate that MDEQ has taken significant steps to refine its methodology for assessing water quality impairments in response to EPA recommendations. We look forward to continued discussions to ensure MDEQ's Assessment Methodology supports full assessment of Michigan's waters.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this draft Methodology. Please let me know if you have questions regarding our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Peter Swenson", is written over the typed name.

Peter Swenson, Chief
Watersheds and Wetlands Branch

Enclosure

cc: Kevin Goodwin, MDEQ
Mike Alexander, MDEQ

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Comments to MDEQ
regarding draft 2018 Assessment Methodology
July 19, 2017

Comments on Michigan 2018 Draft Integrated Report Assessment Methodology, placed on public notice
June 14, 2017:

1. Sections 4.5.2.1 and 4.6.2.1 [Fish Community, Macroinvertebrate Community], pp. 9 and 13: As stated in previous comments on the State's methodology, EPA remains concerned that the threshold levels Michigan uses for listing determinations for Warmwater Fishery and Coldwater Fishery, and Other Indigenous Aquatic Life and Wildlife are at levels which may not fully identify impairment. The Draft Methodology includes attainment thresholds for Wadeable Streams that categorize waters into excellent, acceptable, and poor categories. EPA believes that the threshold for identifying waters between acceptable and poor categories is not stringent enough to capture all impaired waters. In Michigan's response to EPA comments on their 2016 methodology¹, MDEQ agreed that the current thresholds need to be evaluated. Michigan has begun evaluating the macroinvertebrate index and has also indicated an additional need for contractor support. EPA looks forward to continuing our work with MDEQ to resolve issues regarding these threshold levels.
2. Section 4.13 [Delisting Category 5 Assessment Units 4.13], the first bullet on page 29, indicates that the state may move a water body from Category 5 to Category 3 using updated monitoring data or information. Clarification should be made that new data alone will not delist a waterbody/impairment where the State is using the 7-year span for listing. An example of this is in section 4.6.1.1 Water Column Toxic Substance Concentration. For this type of listing determination, the state looks at a seven-year window of the most recent quality assured data. Based on figures 4.1a and 4.1b, if there are ≥ 4 samples collected over any year and ≥ 1 (figure 4.1a) or ≥ 1 or the geometric mean of ≥ 4 (figure 4.1b) samples/results exceed the Water Quality Standard, MDEQ would list the waterbody/impairment as not supporting. EPA guidance recommends that considerations used for delisting waterbodies or impairments should be as stringent as those data and information used to list the waterbody. Therefore, we recommend that the same (or a commensurate) process for listing an impairment should be used for delisting that impairment.

¹ See letter dated December 23, 2015 from Kevin Goodwin, MDEQ to Peter Swenson, USEPA; p3, USEPA Comment IV.

3. Section 4.8.1.1 [Water Column and Fish tissue Mercury Concentrations], Figure 4.4, at the third decision point (diamond): "Is the geometric mean* > 1.8 ng/l+?", use of * and + indicates there are notes associated with this sentence but we were unable to locate the notes. If there are no notes, please remove the note indicators.

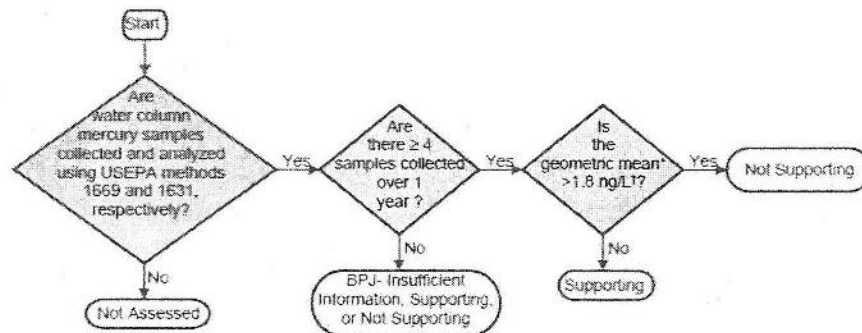


Figure 4.4. Determination of fish consumption designated use support using water column mercury concentration.

4. Section 4.11 [4.11 Assessment Unit Assignment to Categories], Page 26, first full paragraph states: "An assessment unit is considered threatened and is placed in Categories 4 or 5 when water quality data analysis demonstrates a declining trend that is expected to cause that water body to not attain WQS by the next listing cycle (2018)." Should this be changed to 2020? Alternatively, the reference to the date could be removed entirely.